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Contact: Micah Swafford
(202) 225-2132

Seizes Chance To Confront Chairman

Istook Pushes Airline for Better OKC Service

ISTOOK ON THE ISSUES

A Report from Congressman Ernest Istook

Central Oklahoma has a major air service problem—with one airline in particular. So I seized an opportunity last week to chide American Airlines' Chairman Donald J. Carty one-on-one for that airline's horrid system involving Oklahoma City, and pushed the chairman to make immediate improvements. When I learned we were both on the same flight to Washington this week, I slipped Carty a hand-written note, and later we visited privately.

I was blunt and candid, because it's necessary. American Airlines shows no concern whatsoever with the huge loss of time when Oklahoma City passengers fly its American Eagle subsidiary to and from DFW. For businesses, time is money, and too many businesses find it's too expensive to lose this time. It hampers existing companies and also business development. For pleasure travel, it kills the joy of a vacation when flyers are stressed out by the huge hassle.

Here's some of what I told Chairman Carty:

American Airlines' treatment of the Oklahoma City market is disgusting, and I'm ready to take steps to compel the airline to change its operations.

American has a lot of good employees; many tell me they know and detest the problems, but management refuses to fix its horrible system of American Eagle turboprops. The turboprops' slowness and cramped cabins are bad enough, but the worst part is the hassle and delays at DFW. There, awkward shuttle buses are used because the planes are parked far away from the terminal. This enables the airline to cram too many flights through too few gates, but it requires passengers to board and unboard slow and crowded buses, which ferry them out to cramped planes on an overcrowded tarmac. There, passengers also must deal with Texas' heat or foul weather.

The link through DFW is abominable. It disregards the value of passengers' time, their comfort, and their need to have reliable flights and reliable information. American's callous treatment of the Oklahoma City market appalls me. I told the chairman I will do all that I can to require American to set things right immediately (not at some distant future date).

Chairman Carty did not disagree with this evaluation, but did comment about a new facility planned for American Eagle at DFW that might improve things. I told him that still won't bring the immediate relief that's needed, and I reminded him that Oklahoma City felt it was promised service with new regional jets, yet those planes have been put to use elsewhere instead.

As I told the chairman, American Airlines is being pennywise and pound-foolish, because they've squandered the goodwill that is a major asset to any airline. People in Oklahoma City are ready to grab any credible alternative, because they are fed up.

I'm fed up, too, and I'm working with business leaders and in Congress to fix this. Like many other Americans, Oklahomans are tired of being treated like cattle on some airline flights.